



# The Importance of Play in 4K: Using ECERS-3 to Boost Play-Based Learning Environments



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



4C

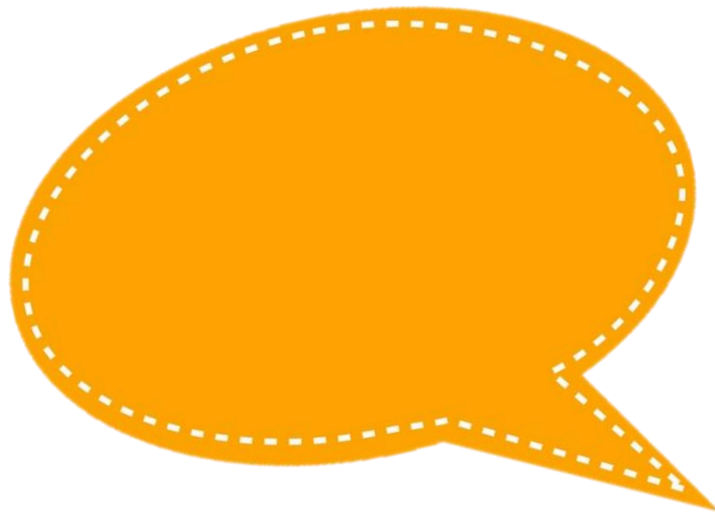
Helping  
Communities  
Help Children

# Introductions

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ECERS-3 Assessment Team

Who's here?



**What do you hope  
to get out of this  
session?**

# Why?

- \* **Values Play-Based Learning**
- \* **More Individualized Teaching Opportunities**
- \* **Nationally Recognized Tool**
- \* **Uniformity across the District**
- \* **Flexibility with Assessment/Review Schedule**
- \* **Authentic Assessment**
- \* **A good baseline of where your programs are at**
  - \* **At the end of the day, this is the child's score!!!**

*“ECERS is the most widely used tool to measure the overall global quality of programs to benefit children.”*



# Embracing the ERS-3 Tools

- Meaningful learning occurs best when there is plenty of time to choose from many activities, with a teacher who brings learning out of play.
- Children are provided with opportunities to explore and apply new skills through a balance of child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities.
- Children thrive when their health and safety needs are met and healthful habits are established for a lifetime.
- Children develop good feelings about themselves and strong social skills from adults who are nurturing and use positive methods of guidance.

# ECERS-3: Key Differences

- For child care classrooms that serve children ages 3 through 5 years old
- No teacher interview, just a 3-hour observation period
- Focuses on interactions
- Emphasis on how teachers use the materials that are accessible to the children
- Adds 5 new language and literacy items with more specific indicators to assess teachers' strategies for guiding language and literacy awareness



# Why is the Environment Important?

*"The quality of the physical space and materials provided affects the level of involvement of the children and the quality of interaction between adults and children."*  
– NAEYC



# Advantages of Play Based Curriculum

- ▶ Encourages Language Skills
- ▶ Develops Social Emotional Skills
- ▶ Fosters Creativity and Imagination
- ▶ Fosters Cognitive Development and Critical Thinking Skills
- ▶ Develops Motor Skills
- ▶ Builds Confidence
- ▶ Can you think of any other benefits?



# All Teachers Have Good Intentions

“but not all practice is effective. ECERS provides an objective vehicle for research-based best practice.”

“teachers may feel that in order to show student achievement, they cannot teach in child-centered developmentally appropriate ways.”

# The Role of the Teacher in ECERS Observation

- For highest score possible the observer is looking for 60 specific instances of varying interactions
- Children need guidance to learn how to communicate with each other, they need opportunities to play together, do routines together and problem solve together
- The effects of negative interactions outweigh positive or neutral interactions

# Format of the ECERS-3 scale

- Scale
  - Subscale
    - Item
      - Indicator



# Overview of the Subscale and the Items of the ECERS-3

## Space and Furnishings

1. Indoor Space
2. Furnishings for care, play and learning
3. Room arrangement for play and learning
4. Space for Privacy
5. Child-Related Display
6. Space for gross motor play
7. Gross Motor Equipment

## Personal Care Routines

8. Meals and Snacks
9. Toileting/diapering
10. Health practices
11. Safety practices

## Language and Literacy

12. Helping Children Expand Vocabulary
13. Encouraging Children to Use Language
14. Staff use of books with children
15. Encouraging Children's Use of Books

## Learning Activities

17. Fine Motor
18. Art
19. Music and Movement
20. Blocks
21. Dramatic Play
22. Nature/Science
23. Math Materials and Activities
24. Math in daily activities
25. Understanding Written Numbers
26. Promoting acceptance of diversity
27. Appropriate use of technology

## Interactions

28. Supervision of gross motor
29. Individualized teaching and learning
30. Staff-Child Interaction
31. Peer Interaction
32. Discipline

## Program Structure

33. Transitions and Waiting Times
34. Free Play
35. Whole Group Activities for Play and Learning

# Items on ECERS-3 Scale Directly Linked to Free Play

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## Program Structure

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- 35. Whole Group Activities for Play and Learning**

## 4. Space for Privacy

It's hard to share everything and that pressure can make your day can feel stressful!

- ▶ Lower Level:
  - ▶ space accessible can be spontaneous
  - ▶ accessible for at least 23 minutes
- ▶ Higher Level:
  - ▶ thought put into a dedicated space for one to two children
  - ▶ space is accessible for at least 1 hour

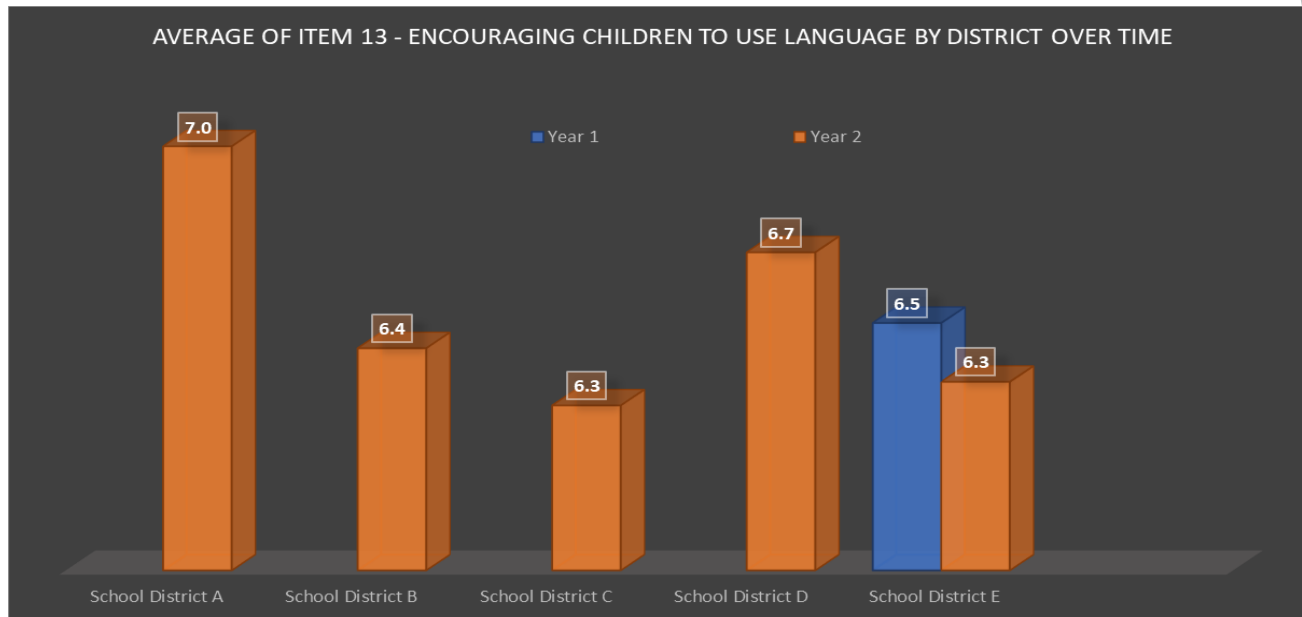
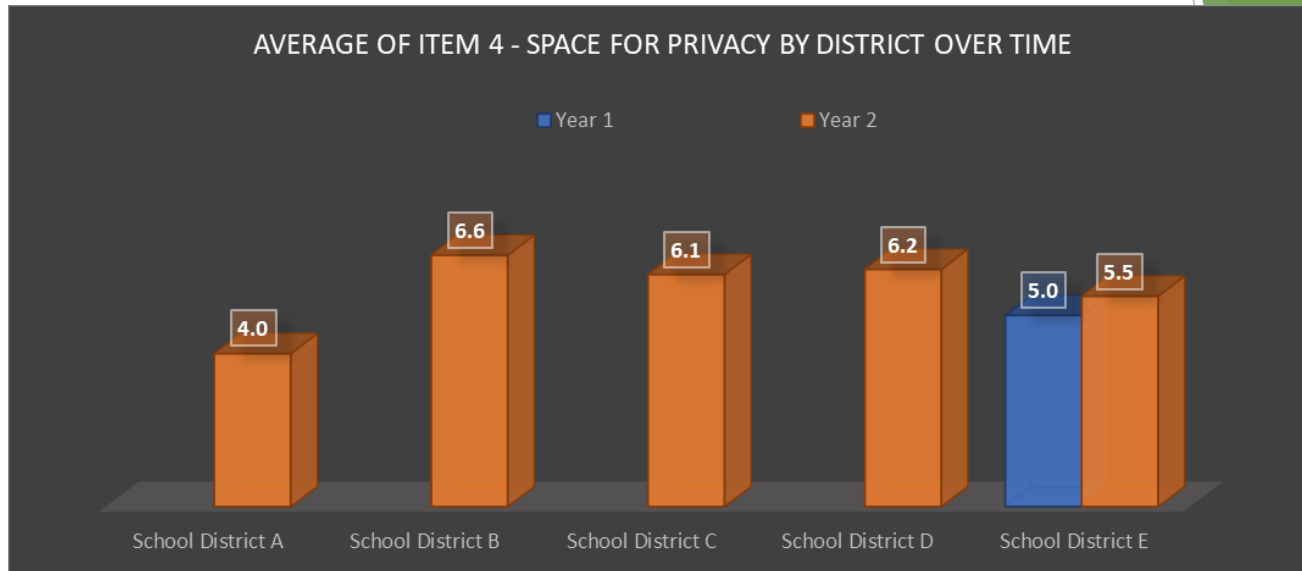


# 13. Encourage Children to Use Language

Staff need to be close enough to children to be able to talk to them about what they are doing or other interests.

- ▶ Lower Level:
  - ▶ Few conversations
  - ▶ Relaxed environment for most of the day
- ▶ Higher Level:
  - ▶ Many conversations during free play and routines
  - ▶ Staff help children communicate with one another

# Data Slides for Items 4 and 13 by District



# 15. Encouraging Children's Use of Books

Promoting a lifetime of literacy begins with a positive relationship with books.

- Lower Level:

- Book times are unpleasant or staff are unenthusiastic
- Staff read 1 book during observation

- Higher Level:

- Staff read to whole group, small group or individually
- Accommodations needed for children who require additional support
- Children are actively engaged and staff show enjoyment
- Books are used informally



# 17. Fine Motor

Access to many fine motor materials help children develop hand eye coordination necessary for writing and self-help skills

Materials are challenging and enjoyable but not frustrating

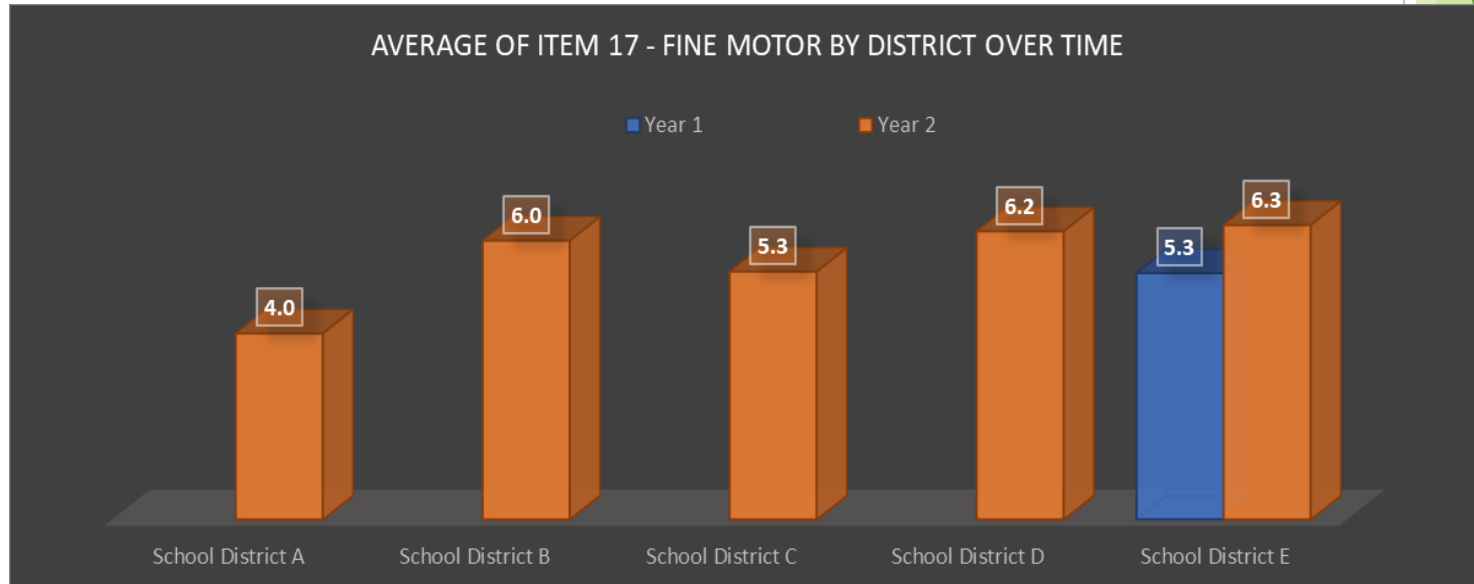
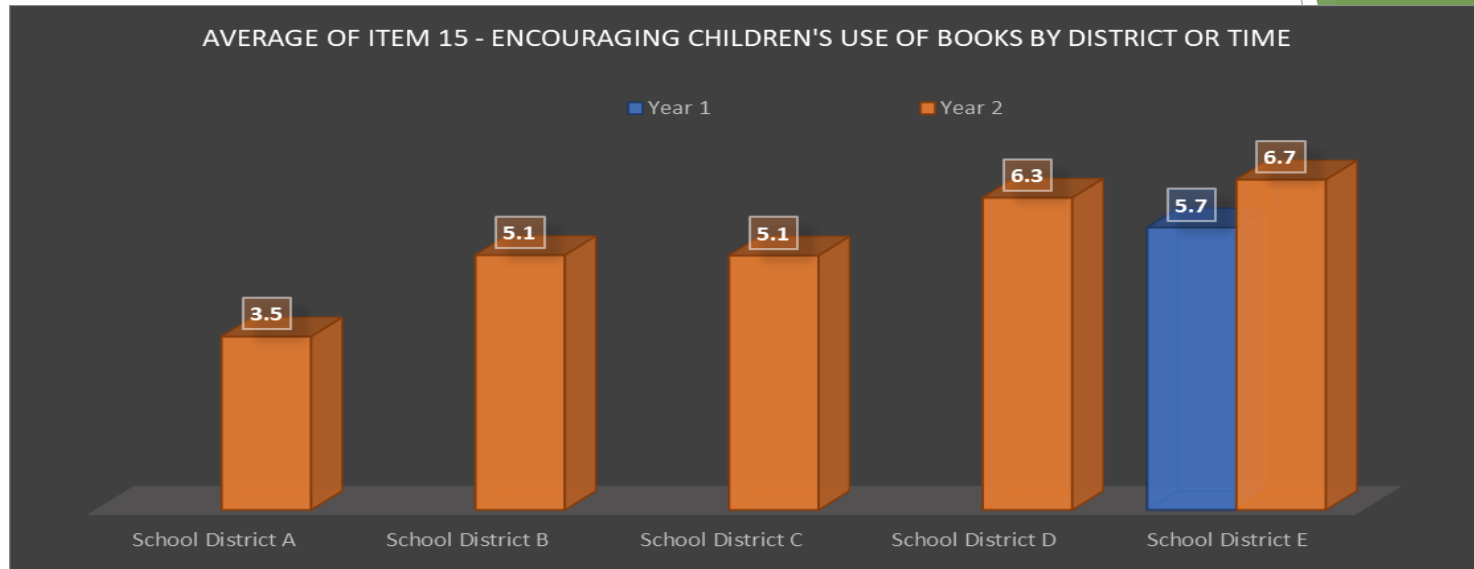
## ► Lower Level:

- 23 minutes of accessibility
- at least 10 choices
- little teacher interest

## Upper Level:

- 1 hour of accessibility
- organized and accessible
- extended teacher interactions

# Data Slides for Items 15 and 17 by District



# 18. Art

Open access to art materials builds fine motor skills, develop creative expression and allow children to experiment with math and science concepts.

- Lower Level:
  - no individualized art
  - limited access to materials
  - little teacher interest
- Higher Level:
  - more complex materials
  - child expression
  - conversations





# 19. Music and Movement

Music activities are available with or without movement and can be part of large group time or free choice. These activities can be child directed or teacher directed.



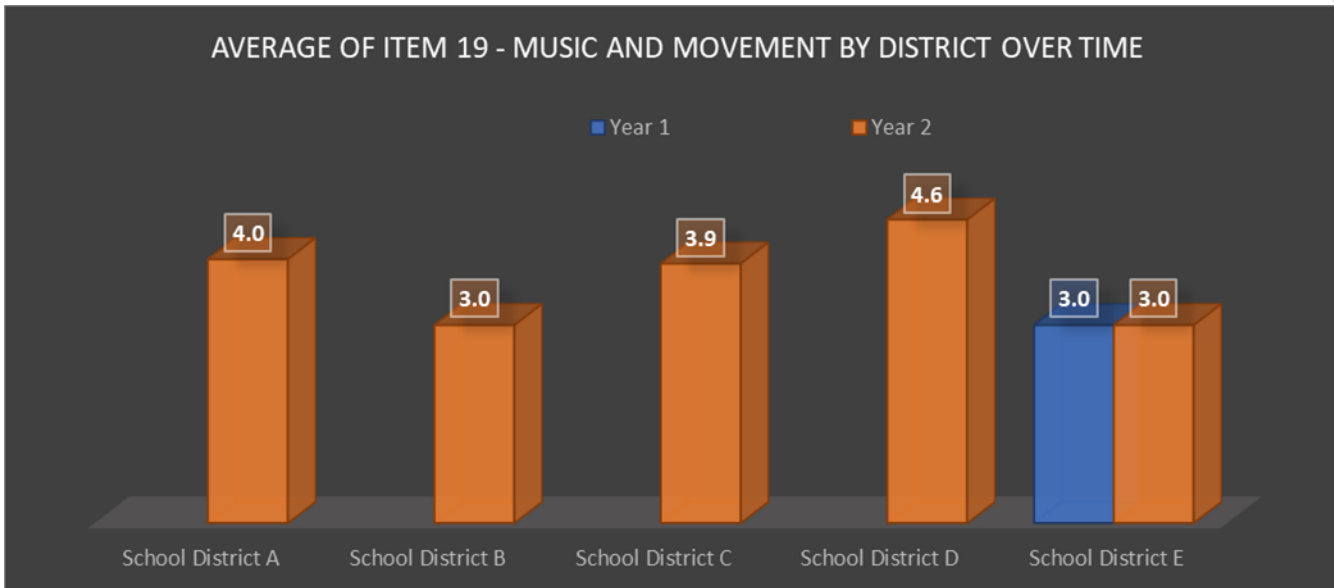
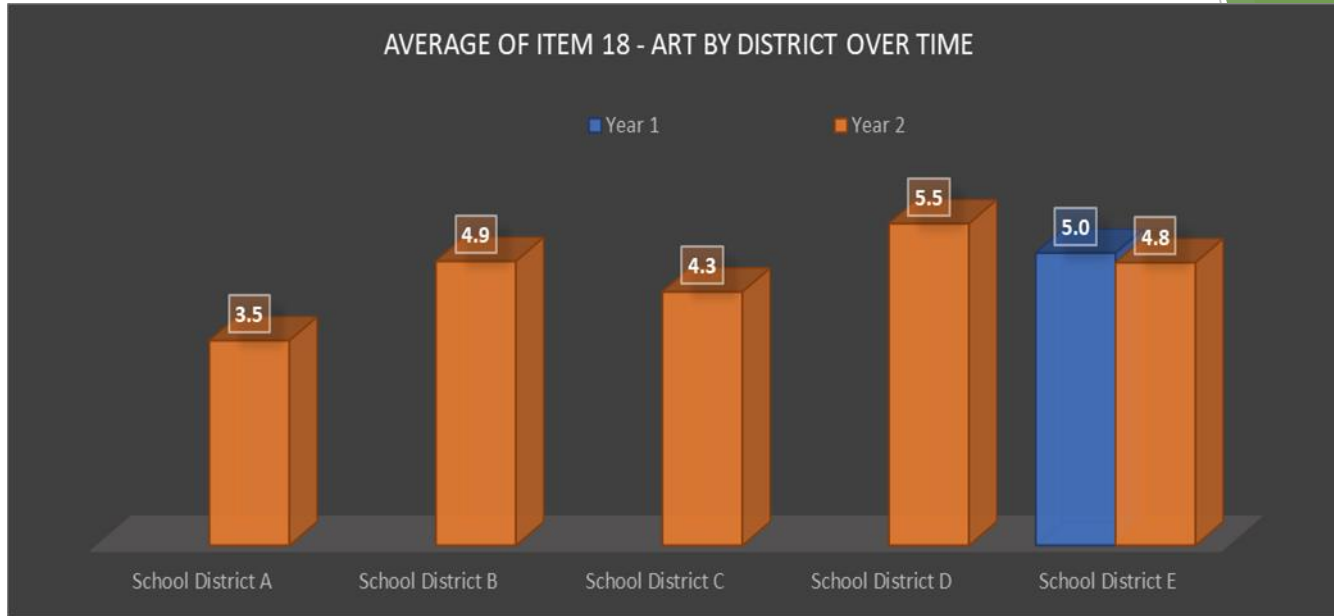
## Lower Level:

- no music or movement
- at least 3 instruments accessible
- loud background music on

## Higher Level:

- at least 10 instruments
- music happening during free play
- children are allowed to find alternate activities

# Data Slides for Items 18 and 19 by District



# 20. Blocks

Many blocks, organized and easy to access in a space big enough to build.

- Lower Level:

- Staff show no interest in children's block play
- Enough blocks and space for 2 children to build sizeable structures
- Blocks and accessories organized by type

- Higher Level:

- Dedicated block interest center
- Interest center open for one hour
- Many conversations in block area



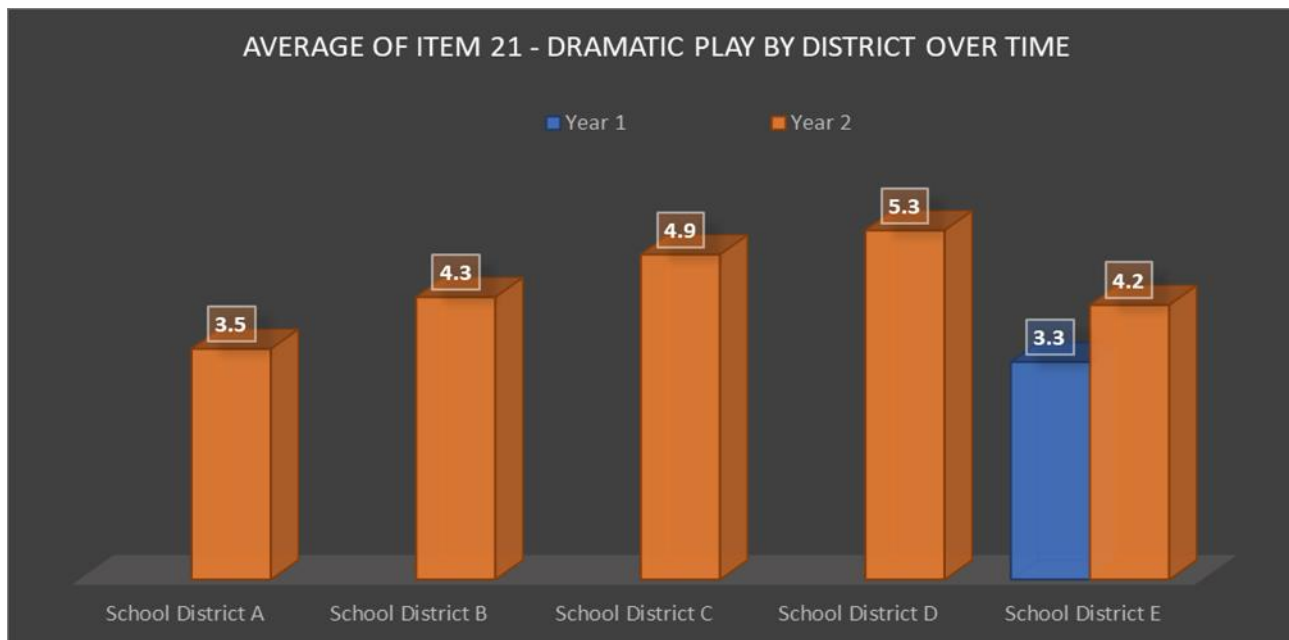
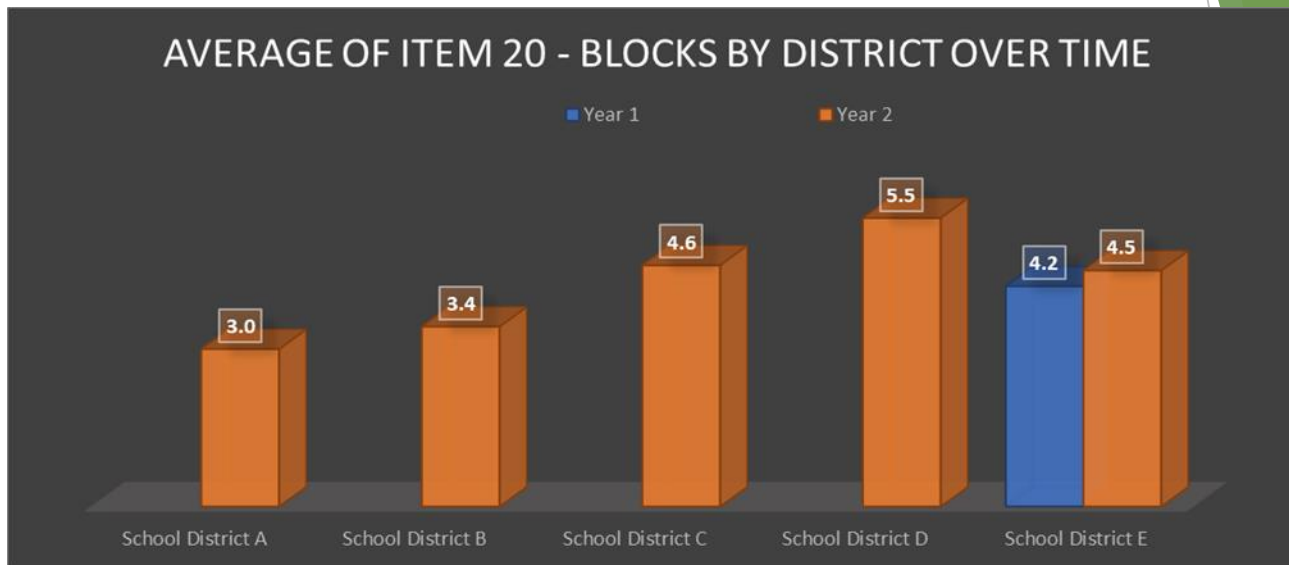
# 21. Dramatic Play

Dramatic Play builds language and social skills. It helps children to make sense of the world they are still exploring.

- **Lower Level:**
  - Staff show little interest in children's play
  - Dramatic play accessible less than 23 minutes a day
- **Higher Level:**
  - Many and varied materials available
  - Dedicated interest area open for one hour a day
  - Staff join in but not takeover the play



# Data Slides for Items 20 and 21 by District



## 22. Nature/Science

Promote the children's enjoyment of nature and exploration of world around.

### Lower Level:

- Staff do not talk about nature/science throughout the observation
- Sand or water is accessible for 25 minutes during observation

### Higher Level:

- Dedicated interest area
- 15 nature/science materials (some from each category)
- 1 hour of access during free play
- Staff model concern for the environment





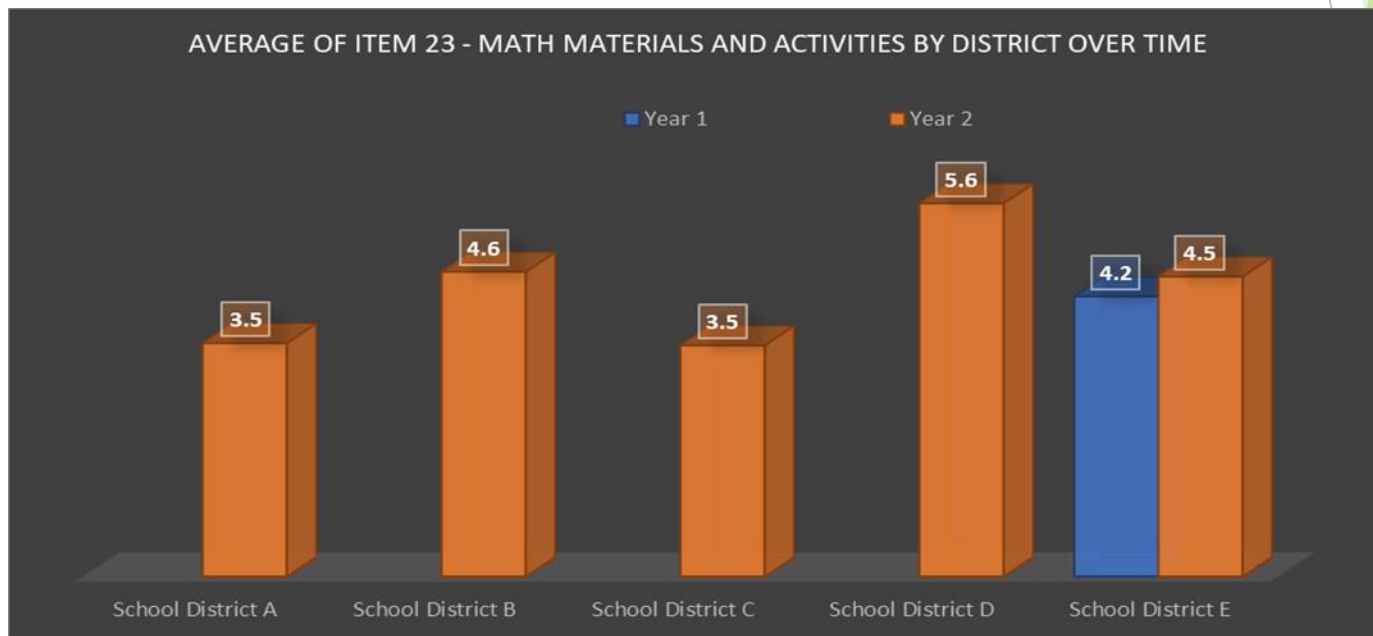
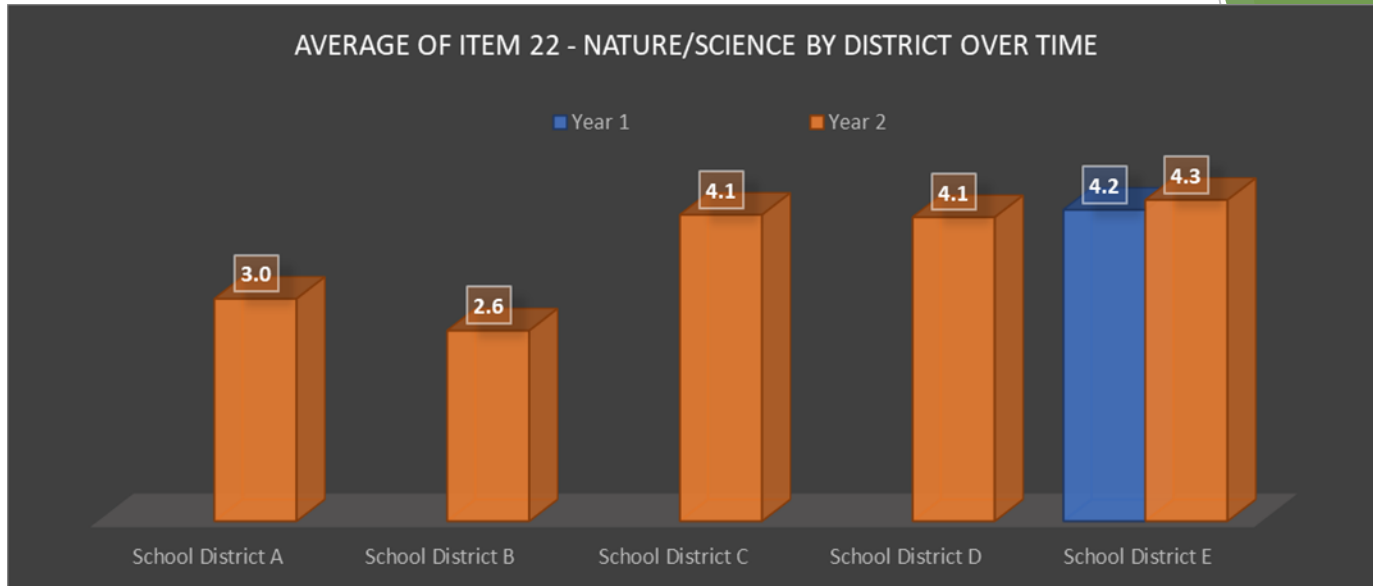
# 23. Math Materials and Activities

Talk about Math! Make it interesting and engaging!  
Build foundations for later abstract math concepts.



- Lower Level:
  - Few or no materials
  - Staff never observed talking about materials
- Higher Level:
  - 10 different materials accessible for an hour
  - Children counting with their fingers
  - Staff relate math to current topic of interest

# Data Slides for Items 22 and 23 by District



# 24. Math in Daily Activities

Meaningful math learning happens when math is applied to the every day and is not formally taught.

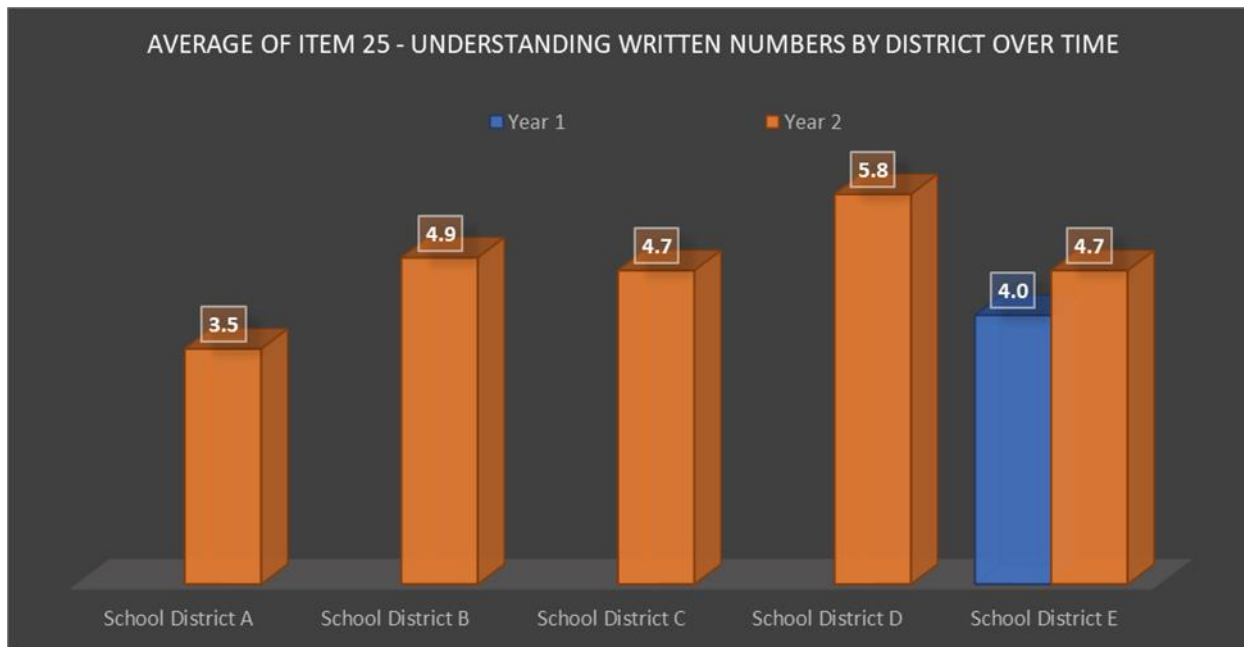
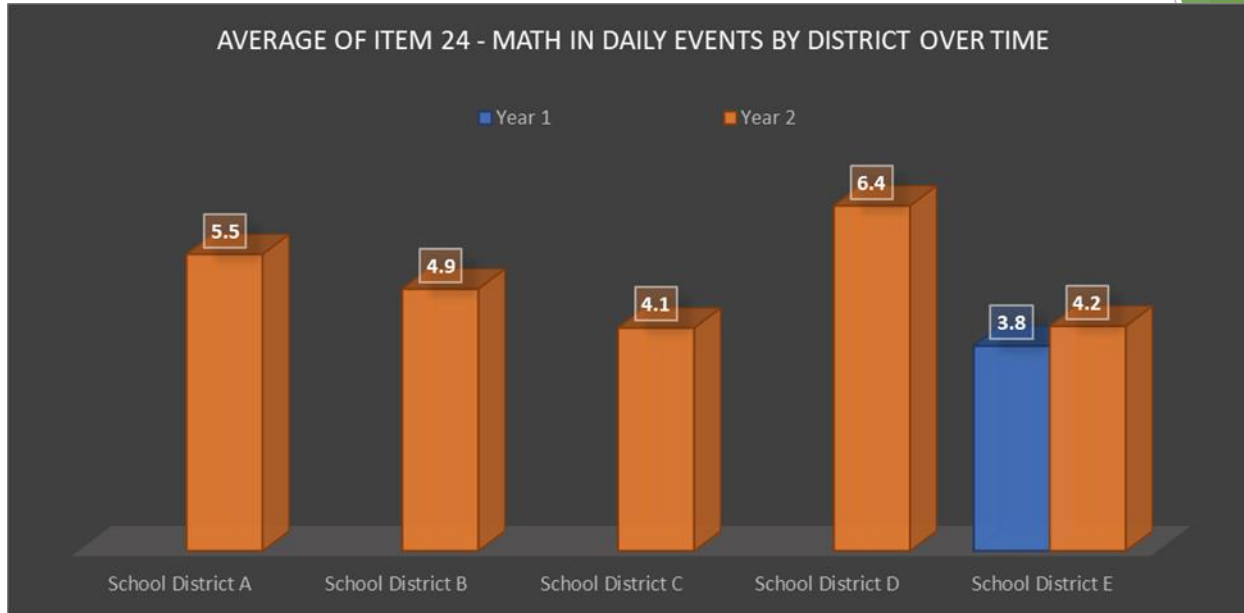
- **Lower Level:**
  - Staff use math in punitive way
  - Staff respond negatively to when children don't understand math talk
- **Higher Level:**
  - Staff encourage math as part of daily routine
  - Staff talk about math in non-math areas
  - Staff ask children to explain their math reasoning.

# 25. Understanding Written Numbers

Children are exposed to written numbers that have meaning for them and related to the quantity they represent.

- Lower Level:
  - Inappropriate expectations
  - No obvious print numbers found
- Higher Level:
  - 3 different play materials that help with meaning of numbers
  - One hour of access to materials
  - Staff frequently show staff how to use number materials

# Data Slides for Items 24 and 25 by District



# 34. Free Play

Child is permitted to select materials and companions and manage both as independently as possible. Free play does not mean free-for-all! Organized structure, safe options, clear choices and staff supervision are essential.





## 34. Free Play (continued)

- Lower Level:
  - Not enough time to complete activities that children choose
- Higher Level:
  - One hour free play inside and out
  - Clear systems for satisfying experiences
  - Ample and varied materials
  - Staff awareness, participation and frequent positive interactions

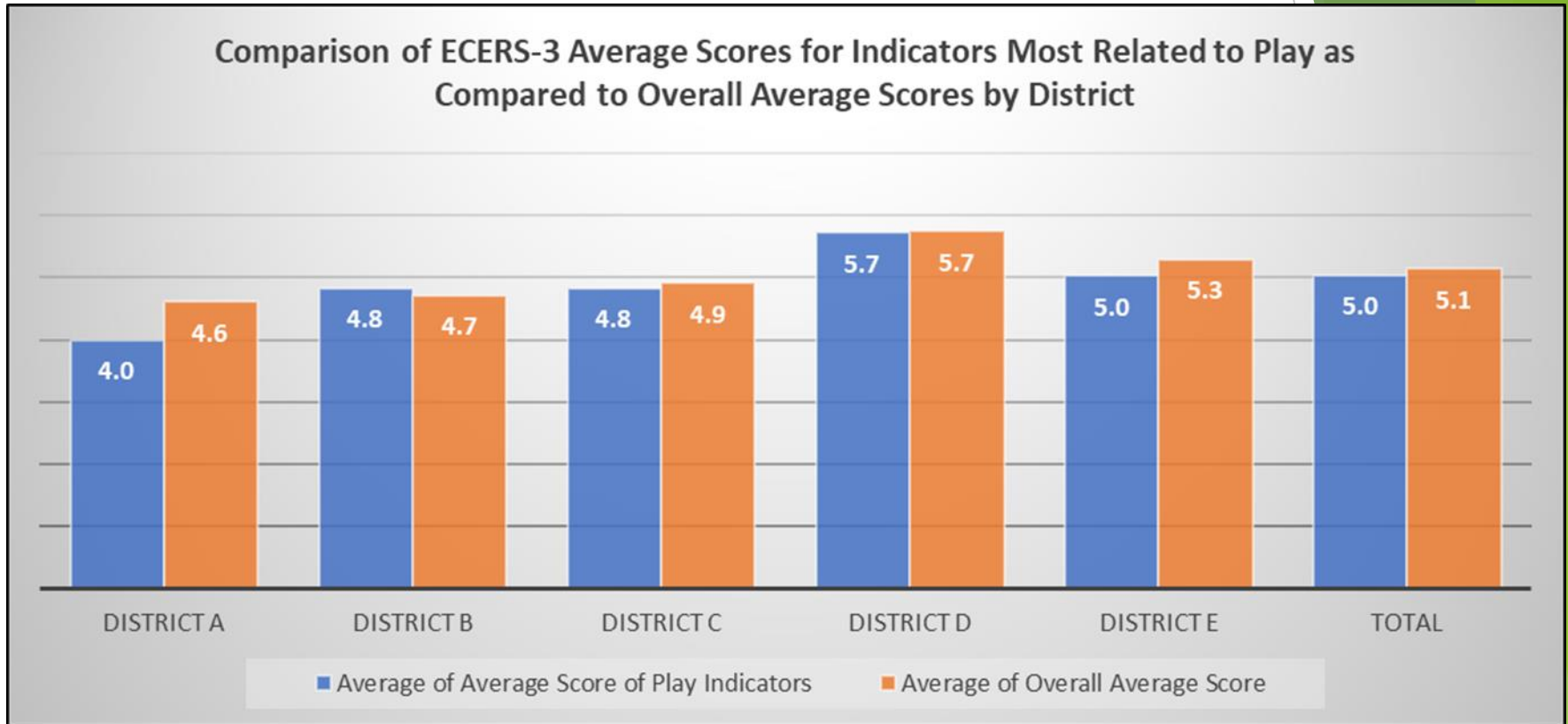
# 35. Whole-Group Activities for Play and Learning

Whole group play and learning activities are considered. Learning requires that children are engaged and interested.

- Lower Level:
  - Activities require passive involvement
  - Carried out in a way that creates problems
- Higher Level:
  - Staff responsive and flexible
  - Staff support
  - Children are allowed to leave the group

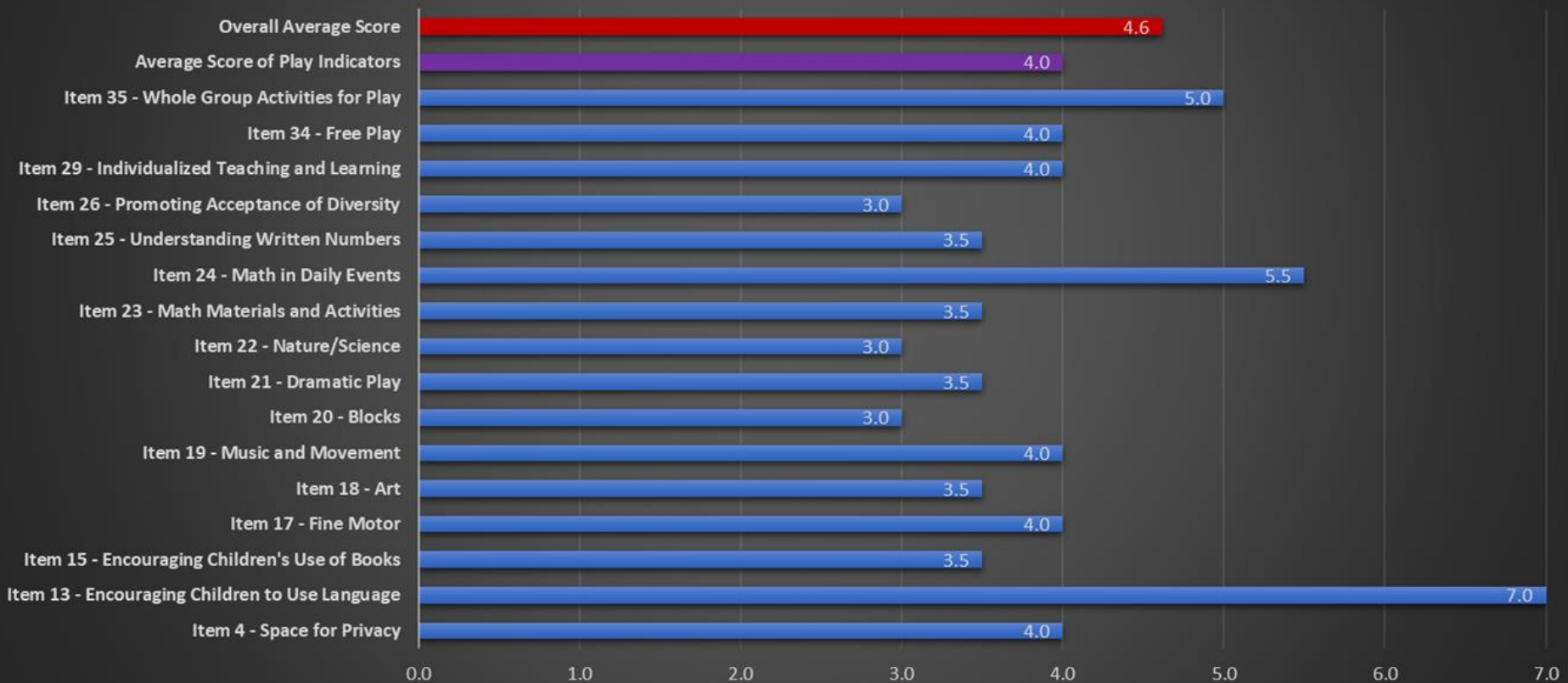


# How do ECERS-3 Scores for the Indicators Related to Play Compare to Overall Scores?



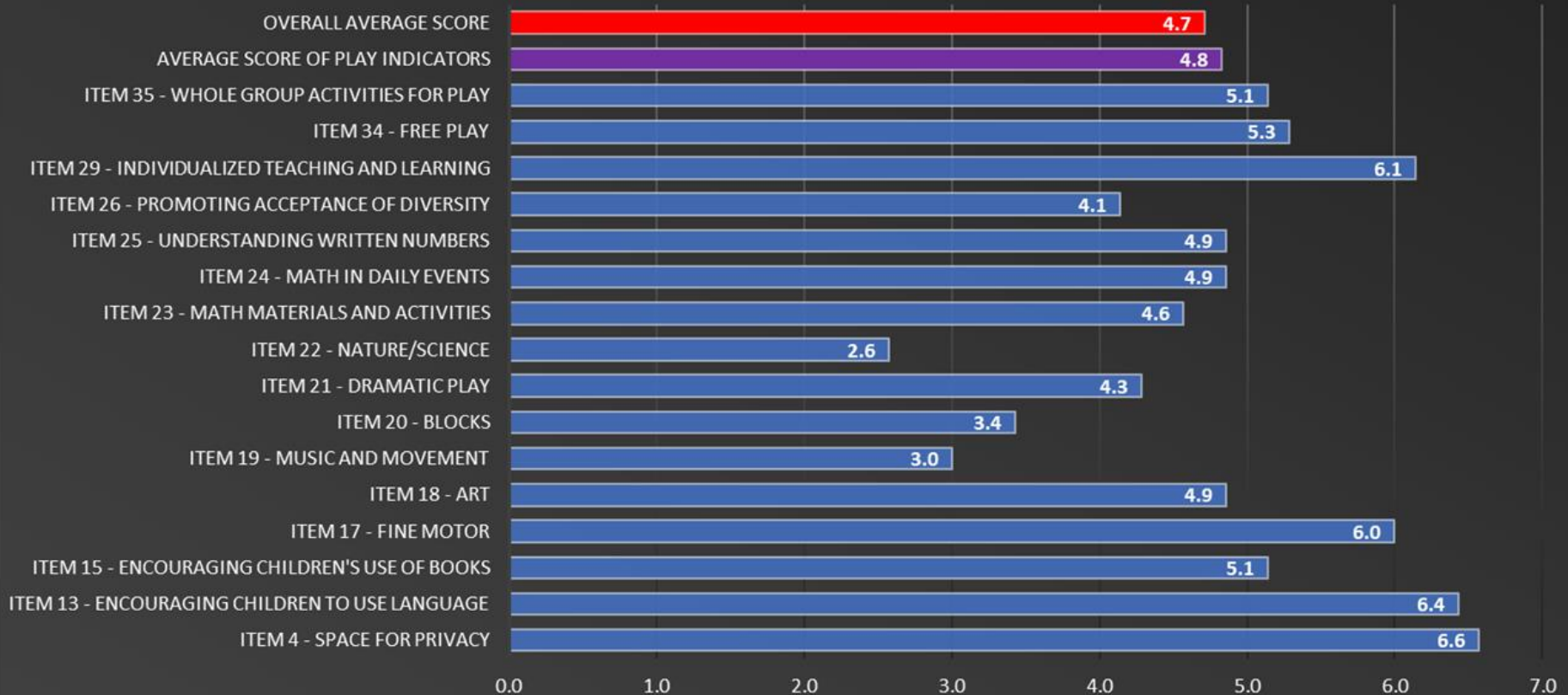
# Looking at ECERS-3 Scores by District as a Summative Report

AVERAGE SCORES FOR ECERS-3 ITEMS MOST RELATED TO PLAY BASED CURRICULUM  
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT A - 2019 OBSERVATIONS  
N=2



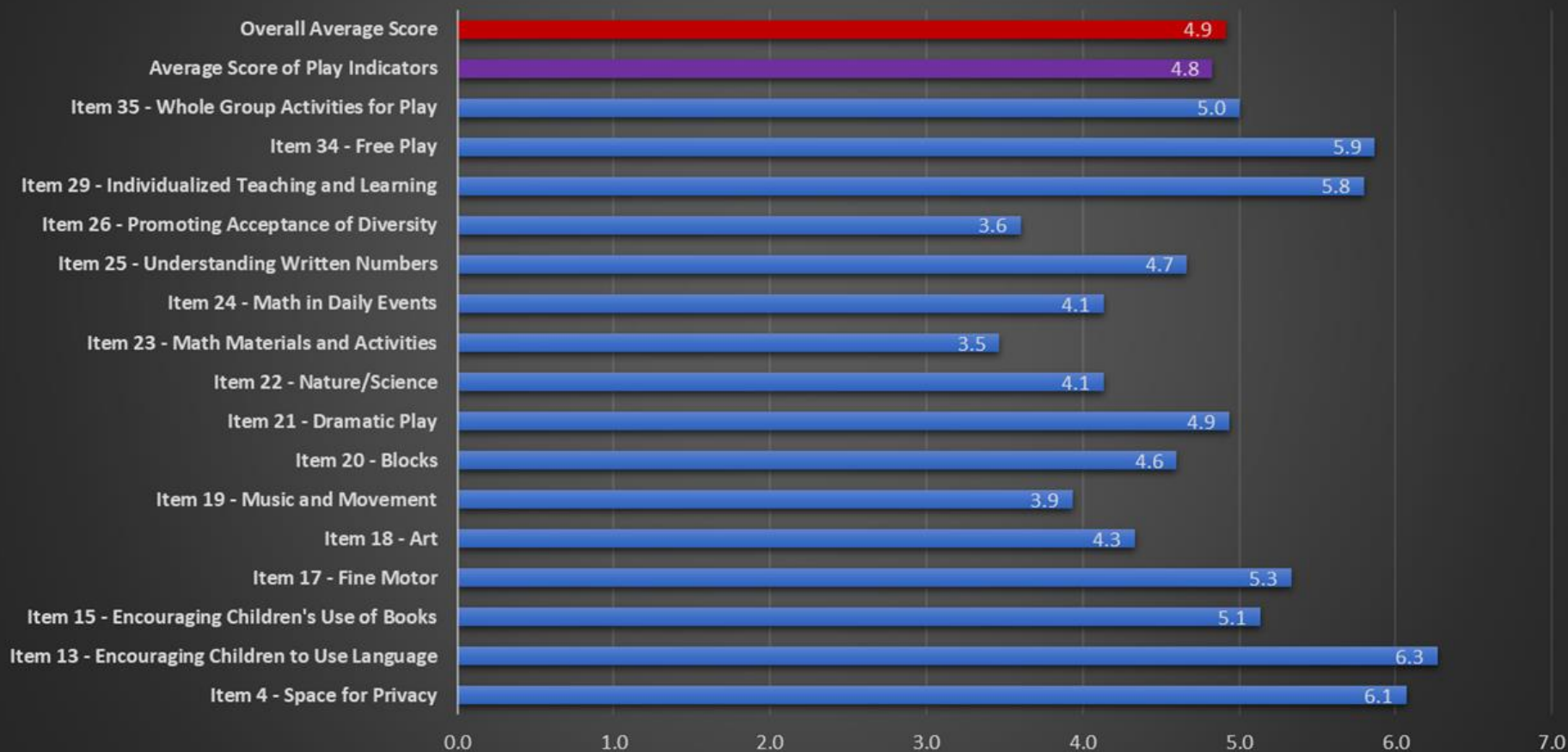
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AVERAGE SCORES FOR ECERS-3 ITEMS MOST RELATED TO PLAY BASED CURRICULUM  
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT B - 2019 OBSERVATIONS  
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# Looking at ECERS-3 Scores by District as a Summative Report

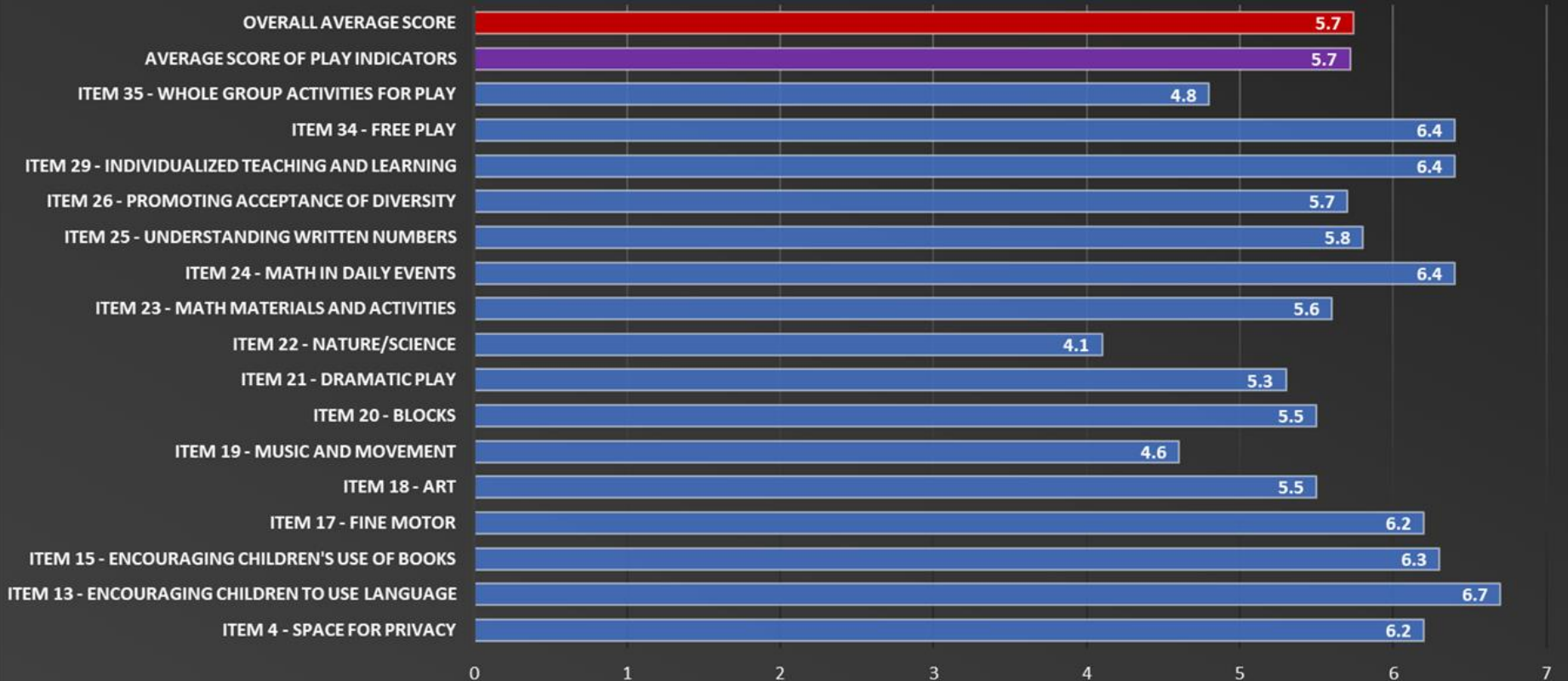
AVERAGE SCORES FOR ECERS-3 ITEMS MOST RELATED TO PLAY BASED CURRICULUM  
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT C - 2019 OBSERVATIONS  
N=15





# Looking at ECERS-3 Scores by District as a Summative Report

AVERAGE SCORES FOR ECERS-3 ITEMS MOST RELATED TO PLAY BASED CURRICULUM  
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT D - 2019 OBSERVATIONS  
N=10

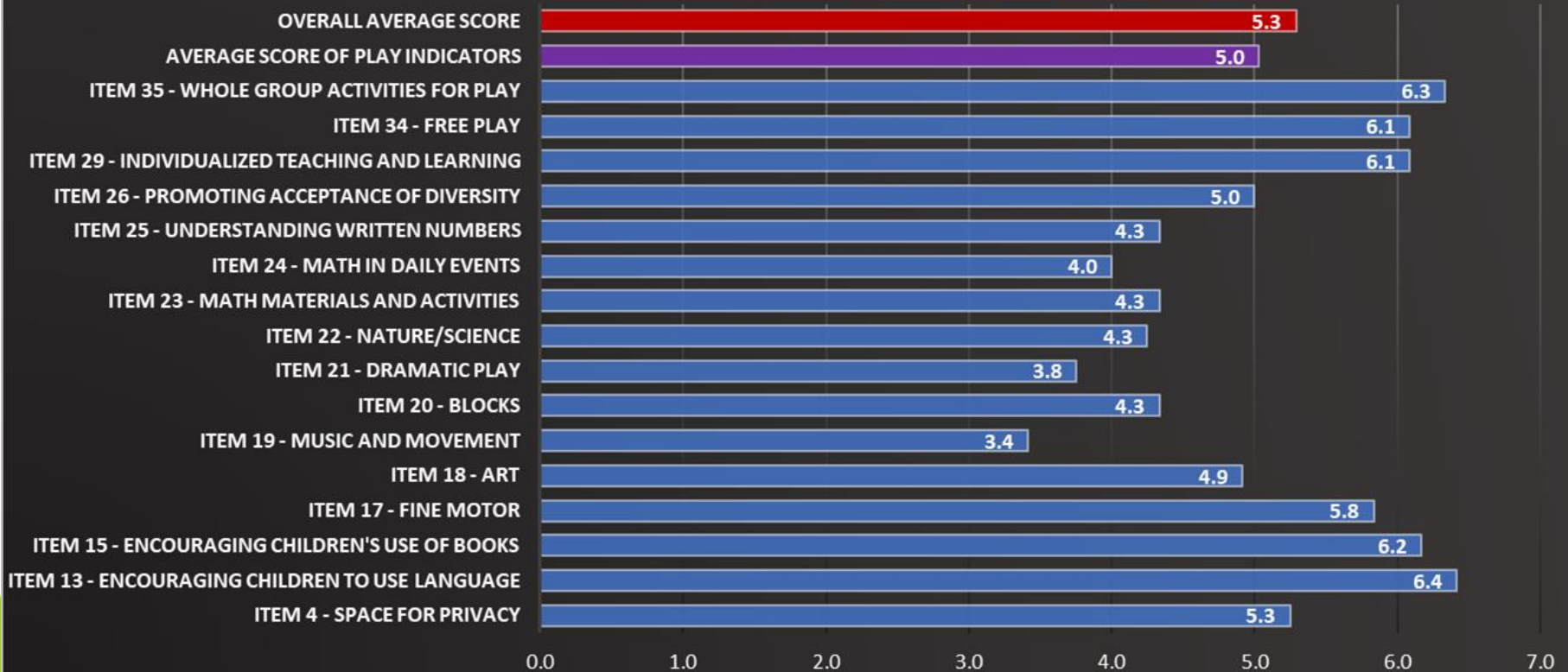




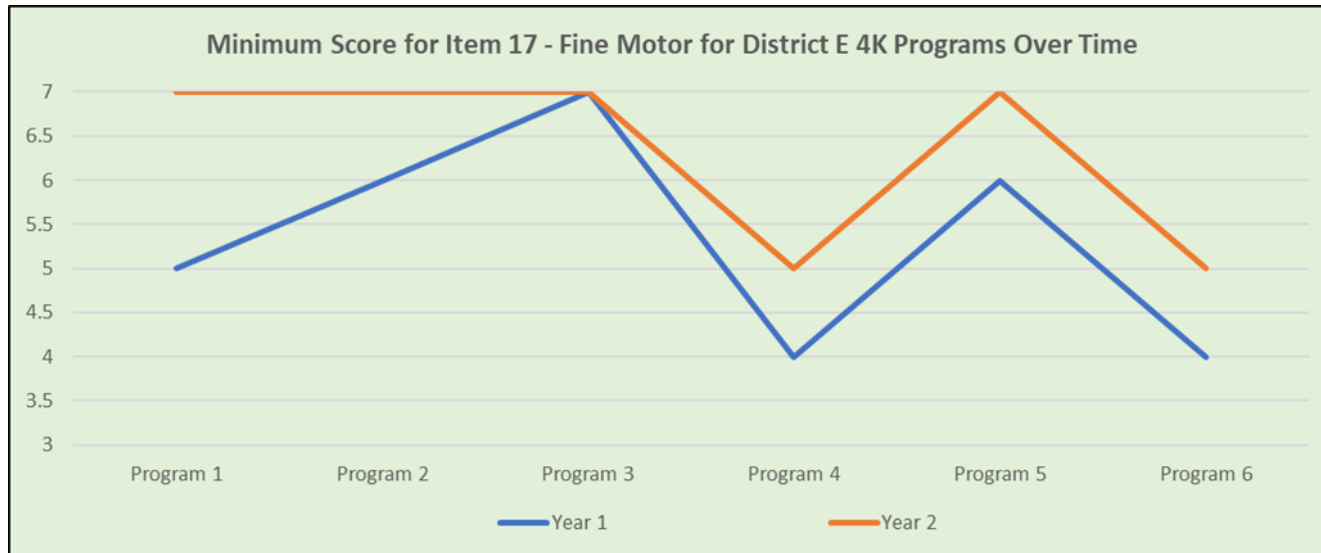
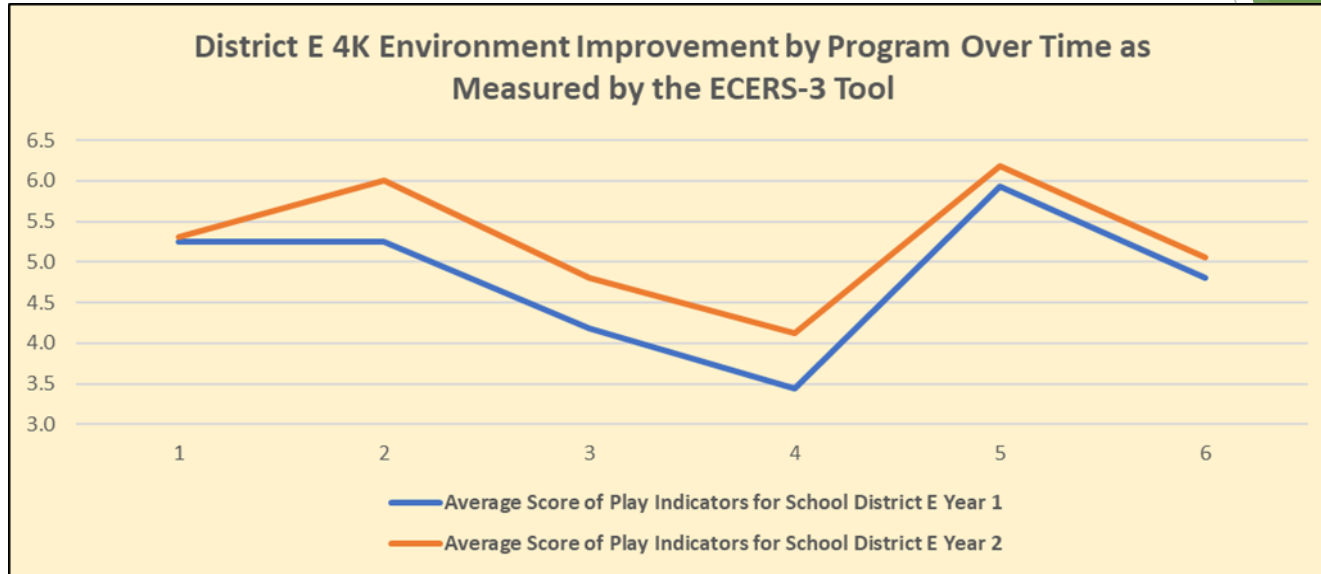
# Looking at ECERS-3 Scores by District as a Summative Report

## AVERAGE SCORES FOR ECERS-3 ITEMS MOST RELATED TO PLAY BASED CURRICULUM FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT E - 2019 OBSERVATIONS

N=12



# Looking at Comparative Data for a District for Improved Play Environments Over Time



# How Could ECERS-3 Improve Consistency in 4K Services within Districts?

What needs do you see being served when using the ECERS-3 tool for your district across 4K programs?

- New staff
- Measuring improvement over time
- Timeline and flexibility with teaching staff
- Identifying areas for potential growth

# How could ECERS-3 Improve Consistency in 4K Services Statewide?

What goals/needs do you see being served when using the same ECERS-3 tool across districts?

- Common expectations for staff
- Comparative data on 4K services over time at the statewide level
- A child attending a 4K program in a Western district could expect to receive similar services in a Northeastern district



# Questions?

For additional information please contact:  
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